

## SIMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND BEPOEMEB 377

made by Alexandra Dumas *re*, who relates in a novel that the peritonitis (!) of one of his characters was perforated by a sword thrust. Dumas certainly wrote rapidly, at times anyhow; but we must remember that the most painstaking works often fall short of perfection. Mérimé rewrote "Colomba" sixteen times before he sent it to the press; nevertheless several slips have been found in it. Haubert devoted six years to "Madame Bovary," and yet pictured one of its characters paying another exactly eighty-five francs in two-franc pieces. Briefly, lapses are to be found in the most carefully written books as well as in the best-regulated families.<sup>1</sup>

In Zola's short stories, particularly the earlier ones, his style often remains light even when it is most ornate. In the Rougon-Macquart novels, the insistence on a multiplicity of details tends to heaviness. Zola was well aware of it, for as far back as 1884, in conversation with Edmond de Goncourt, Maupassant, Huysmans, Alexis, and an English friend/ he said; "I am in the habit of feeling the pulse of the public, and am compelled to say that I notice signs of a reaction against us. . . . Our books will be regarded as heavy, and we cannot hide from ourselves that they are not easy to read. To follow us the reader has to make a determined mental effort," There is no little truth

<sup>1</sup> "We refer farther on to the death of Macquartby  
spontaneous combus-  
tion, in \*'Le Docteur Pascal."

<sup>2</sup> The last named (Mr. George Moore *1*) gave, it seems, an  
account of this  
conversation in the \*\*St. James's Gazette," May 13, 1884;  
and the article  
was translated and published in Paris. Not having seen  
the English text,  
the present writer has followed the French version, It  
appears that the con-  
versation took place at the house of Edmond de Goncourt,  
on an occasion  
when the latter read to his friends his preface to "Che'ie,"  
in which he bade  
farewell to literature.